3: Lévi-Strauss E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
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are to be cultivated; and, generally speaking, he will organize the occupations according to the seasons' needs and possibilities. 622

These rather versatile duties, it should be pointed out from the start, are not facilitated by any fixed power or recognized authority. Consent is at the origin of leadership, and consent, too, furnishes the only measure of its legitimacy. Disorderly conduct (according to the native standards) and unwillingness to work on the part of one or two discontented individuals may seriously jeopardize the chief's program and the welfare of his small group. In this eventuality, however, the chief has no coercivitive power at his disposal. The eviction of the bad people can take place only in so far as the chief is able to make public feeling coincide with his own opinion. Thus, he must continuously display a skill belonging more to the politician trying to keep hold of his fluctuating majority than to an over-powering ruler. Furthermore, he does not only need to keep his group together. Although the band lives practically alone and by itself during the nomadic period, the existence of the other bands is not forgotten. It is not enough to do well; the chief must try—and his people count on him for that—to do better than the others. [627]

No social structure is weaker and more fragile than the Nambikuara band. If the chief's authority appears too exacting, if he keeps too many women for himself (I shall later analyze the special features of the chief's polygamy), or if he does not satisfactorily solve the food problem in times of scarcity, discontent will very likely appear. Then, individuals, or families, will separate from the group and join another band believed to be better managed. For instance, this band may get better fare from the discovery of new hunting or gathering emplacements; or it may have become richer in ornaments or implements, through trade with neighboring groups, or more powerful as a result of a successful war expedition. The day will come when the chief finds himself heading a group too small to face the problems of daily life, and to protect his women from the covetousness of other bands. In such cases, he will have no alternative but to give up his command and to rally, together with his last followers, a happier faction. Therefore, Nambikuara social structure appears continuously on the move. The bands take shape, then disorganize, they increase and they vanish. Within a few months, sometimes, their composition, number and distribution cannot be recognized. Political intrigues within the same band and conflicts between bands impose their rhythm upon these fluc- 621 622

The chief advises

[627] [623] [624] [928] [763] [843] [837] [774] [782] [753] [821] [776] [824]

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